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TROLLEY CAR RIDING PAST AND PRESENT GREENFIELD TOPIC

Waning Popularity of This
Type of Transportation
Recalls Past Glories

**SITUATION SERIOUS,
AREA OFFICIALS SAY**

**Operating Revenue Drops
Far Below 1927 Peak In
Municipally Owned Green-
field-Montague Road**

From Our Special Correspondent

Greenfield, Oct. 21.—If the writer's attitude does not applaud the waning popularity of the trolley car, it may be ascribed to sentiment, like the trolley car itself a curious relic of those gay nineties that are spoken of with tolerant and often contemptuous humor.

Almost the writer's first associations of an adventurous nature were with the trolleys. This was at a time when the family hero wore brass buttons and seemed lord of all he surveyed from the front platform of a Springfield trolley. Chester W. Chapin and George M. Atwater had introduced the horse-drawn cars to Springfield in 1870, about 30 years before, and electric had been in operation there for some 10 years. It was a thrill indeed to board the proper car from among a myriad color combinations roaring past, and to go clanging down the Main street of the metropolis behind the sturdy figure of one's own uncle, a man of might who had in his control so many human beings, before whose onward rush the thickest traffic melted.

Electric trolley cars were in operation here within five years of their appearance in Springfield. First promoted by Harry L. Pierce of Leominster, the project finally won support and franchises for construction of a line from near the foot of Clay hill through Cheapside, then a part of Deerfield, to the Connecticut river at Montague City, where passengers walked across the covered wooden bridge and boarded a waiting car for Turners Falls, Lake Pleasant and Millers Falls. The first trip over this line was made the afternoon of June 23, 1895, when two carloads of officials and guests left the old Union house and proceeded to the end of the line at Millers Falls. Crowds greeted them along the way and on the return a stop was made at Lake Pleasant for a banquet and appropriate speeches.

Cars went on regular schedule two days later, with fares 10 cents to Turners and 20 to Millers Falls. The bridge across the Connecticut was finished early in July, while in August the line was extended to Four corners by way of Clay hill and Federal street.

Extravagance Reigned

Riding on the trolleys never reached so high a peak of extravagance here as it did at Springfield, where there were palace cars fitted out with Wilton carpets, draperies at the windows, china, and linen cupboards, water coolers, club chairs and Negro porters. At Springfield, society trolley parties combined "drawing room sociality" with a delightful scenery. Still and all, a trolley trip to Lake Pleasant in the days when any self-propelled vehicle that would go was a novelty, was attended with as great enthusiasm as a visit to the Century of Progress exposition today.

The trolley car made the manners of a generation. It was a vogue that rivaled the coaster bicycle and became almost as much of an institution as the steam railroad. A whole set of customs, such as that of giving up one's seat to women passengers, sprang up around the electric car. What small boy did not learn to place pins and pennies, and torpedoes later, on the trolley tracks? Its praises were the theme of song and story, and strong men burst forth in rapturous rhyme of which the following is a mild example:—

"I sing the song of the open car,
And the man at the end of the seat
Who never is willing to move along
Or even retract his feet."

If trolley tripping had become a more elaborate pastime in the vicinity of Springfield because of more luxurious equipment, there was no monopoly of scenery, no favored destination to which Greenfield riders were for long denied access. The Bay State Construction company, composed of John A. Taggart, Daniel P. Abercrombie, Jr., and Charles W. Clapp, had built the Lake Pleasant line to Montague village in 1899. Four years later the Federal-street line was extended on Silver street to Chapman, and the West Main and Conway-street branch was built to Nash's Mills.

Old Deerfield Reached

In that same year, 1903, the Greenfield & Deerfield Street Railway company built a line from the south side of the Deerfield river at Cheapside to Old Deerfield. The next year the Cheapside bridge was built and the line was extended to South Deerfield, while in 1905 the Greenfield and Deerfield company merged with the Northampton Street Railway company to fill the gap through Hatfield, making Holyoke's great resort at Mountain park, Mt Tom, as accessible to local residents as to those of Springfield.

Other beauty spots were close at hand, and hundreds of Greenfield boys and girls went to Sunday-school picnics at Rock dam, Montague City and Laurel Park aboard the trolley cars. Finally, when electric railways reached the zenith of their popularity, it was possible to go, with minor "portages," all the way from Greenfield to Boston or New York by trolley.

Sooner perhaps than anyone expected, the vogue of the trolley car declined. Just as steam cars had lost favor with the crowds that once excursioned many miles to spend a day at Mt Toby, so the trolley carried lighter loads as the automobile improved in range and dependability. Electric roads from Shelburne Falls to Colrain and from Conway to South River were among the first to go in Franklin county. A contemplated line from Colrain city to Wilmington, Vt., was never built. The Orange-Athol line was finally abandoned, as the Millers Falls-Lake Pleasant-Montague and the Deerfield-Hatfield runs had already been given up. Invention of the third-rail method of transmitting power failed to stem a tide that had definitely set, and a system that at one time literally crisscrossed the state began to go to pieces.

In Franklin county, the Greenfield & Turners Falls and the Greenfield, Deerfield & Northampton companies had in 1905 merged with the Northampton & Amherst company to form the Connecticut Valley Street Railway company, operating 48 miles of line in Montague, Greenfield, Deerfield, Whately, Hatfield, Northampton, Hadley and Amherst.

In 1911 the Connecticut Valley company became subsidiary to the Mas-

sachusetts Consolidated Railways, and for a decade prospered greatly. Its gross revenue increased from \$120,000 in 1905 to \$280,000 in 1919. The World war intervened. Labor and material prices rose while fares remained perforce the same, at least until it was too late. The Connecticut Valley company went into receivership in 1921 and, aided by the automobile and a court order to cease operation, out of business entirely in 1923.

A year later the Greenfield & Montague Transportation area, sponsored by the local Chamber of Commerce and the Turners Falls Board of Trade, was incorporated under the transportation area act of 1924 to continue trolley service in the two communities. Greenfield put up some \$70,000 and Montague, \$30,000 to keep the system going. The physical equipment, including 8½ miles of track, had a replacement value of about \$500,000 and was bought for \$62,000. Much of the surplus, which was turned over to the trustees for working capital, was spent on extensive improvements throughout the system. It was money wisely spent.

Operating Revenue Drops

As pointed out at the trustees' meeting this week, the area carried more than 1,000,000 passengers in 1927, the peak year since 1924. Last year, however, only 471,000 rides were sold. Whereas it has been estimated the line should earn \$80,000 a year to pay its operating expense, the estimated operating revenue for this year has dropped to \$39,000. Even by dint of the most careful management, this year's operating expense will reach the vicinity of \$45,000, it is believed.

What to do about it is a problem which, because the system is municipally owned and operated, the residents of Greenfield and Montague will ultimately have to solve. The area has a balance in the treasury of more than \$27,000, and on the other side of the ledger an annual deficit of about \$3500 for the past three years. Even though complete industrial recovery should balance current income and expense, there is still the maintenance factor with which to reckon. In another year or two the line will need extensive repairs, requiring the expenditure of thousands of dollars, it is said.

The Greenfield-Montague electric road is said to be the only system in the state still operating under the transportation area act. Those who knew the thrill of riding on the trolleys in their early days are loath to contemplate their passing. Sentiment, of course, has but little place in transit problems. The area represents a large original investment. If this can be protected by continued operation, it would be folly to replace the present system with something which owes its chief attraction to its novelty. Busses are admittedly more flexible, though gear-shift cars go to pieces quickly in purely local use, while the initial cost of gas-electric types now favored for all city service is high.

Study of the problem may dictate changes, but if any are made, so long as transportation here is furnished by the towns involved, those areas of each community that owe their development to the trolley system must be served in preference to areas that have been without that service.